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ABSTRACT

Students today face a daily explosion of information resources and the challenge of using these resources effectively and responsibly. Information literacy instruction (ILI) requires a shift in focus from teaching specific information resources to a set of critical thinking skills involving the use of information. ILI in an academic setting includes a variety of instructional approaches, such as course-related library instruction sessions, course-integrated projects, online tutorials, and stand-alone courses. Those running formal ILI programs consider curricular objectives, invoking combinations of instructional solutions over a period of time. This ERIC Digest examines characteristics of successful programs, presents specific examples of approaches currently being undertaken by academic libraries to support ILI, and addresses common challenges in developing and maintaining ILI programs. (Contains 28 references.) (AEF)

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Information Literacy Instruction in Higher Education

Trends and Issues

By Abby Kasowitz-Scheer and Michael Pasqualoni

Students today face a daily explosion of information resources and the challenge of using these resources effectively and responsibly. Academic libraries worldwide have responded by providing instruction in information literacy, described as the "ability to locate, manage, critically evaluate, and use information for problem solving, research, decision making, and continued professional development" (Orr, Appleton, & Wallin, 2001, p. 457).

Information literacy instruction (ILI) requires a shift in focus from teaching specific information resources to a set of critical thinking skills involving the use of information. This change is reflected within the Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, developed by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) (American Library Association, 2000). ILI in an academic setting includes a variety of instructional approaches, such as course-related library instruction sessions, course-integrated projects, online tutorials, and stand-alone courses (Spitzer, Eisenberg, & Lowe, 1998). Those running formal ILI programs consider curricular objectives, invoking combinations of instructional solutions over a period of time.

This ERIC Digest examines characteristics of successful programs, presents approaches currently being taken by academic libraries to support ILI, and addresses common challenges in developing and maintaining ILI programs.

Best Practices

Since higher education institutions vary widely in mission and student body, ILI programs should be designed to meet specific needs rather than a prescribed set of criteria (Breivik, 1998). Implementation of a particular approach or program depends on many institutional and situational factors such as audience, purpose, budget, staffing, facilities, and time (Grassian & Kaplowitz, 2001).

ACRL's Best Practices Initiative (American Library Association, 2001) offers one of the most complete sets of best practice characteristics. These characteristics emphasize the importance of integrating ILI throughout a student's entire academic career and advise using multiple methods of assessment for evaluating ILI programs. ACRL provides a detailed outline of the recommended components for excellent ILI planning, collaborative ILI pedagogy, outreach to academic departments and other efforts necessary for creating successful ILI outcomes.

In addition, the literature offers some specific characteristics of successful ILI programs:

- use of student-centered, active, and collaborative learning methods (Wilson, 2001)
- adherence to instructional design principles during planning (Hinchliffe & Woodard, 2001)
- relevance to particular course goals and, ultimately, the overall curriculum (Breivik, 1998; Dewald, 1999)
- formation of partnerships between library, faculty, and other campus departments (Stoffle, 1998)
- support of faculty learning and development (Wilson, 2001)
- scalability for large numbers of students (Stoffle, 1998)

Current Approaches

A variety of approaches and combinations of approaches have been taken, depending on the particular needs of the institution. The following sections provide some recent examples.

Online Information Literacy Instruction

With an increase in remote access to information and a demand for more rapid, anytime-anyplace sharing of information (Bawden, Devon, & Sinclair, 2000), many academic libraries have started to offer ILI via the Internet. The most common online instructional tool is the Web-based guide (e.g., pathfinders, webliographies) (Vander Meer, 2000). Another trend that has gained popularity is the information literacy tutorial, which is an interactive, Web-based program designed to introduce students to general information literacy concepts and information resources. These tutorials sometimes replace or supplement in-person library instruction sessions (Donaldson, 2000). Specific cases receiving recent attention within higher education include:

- The University of Texas at Austin's Texas Information Literacy Tutorial (TILT) integrates Web-based ILI into first-year college courses and enhances students' conceptual grasp of information resource selection, database searching and Internet source evaluation. University of Texas, Austin offers interested educational institutions a zero-license fee option for customizing TILT to meet individual needs (Dupuis, 2001).
- The California State University Information Competence Project presents ILI tutorials in a visually interesting environment and addresses mass media literacy. Interactive learning exercises and diverse audiovisual components (e.g., sound, quick-time movies, animations) are incorporated (Clay, Harlan, & Swanson, 2001).
- The University of Washington Information Literacy Learning (UWILL) initiative is designed to teach information literacy skills in context with course objectives. Customized tutorials assist students in completing course assignments while developing information competencies (University of Washington, 2001).

Online ILI tutorials are helpful in many ways to students, faculty and librarians. However, they are also criticized for being tedious and text-heavy (Vander Meer, 2000); presented as stand-alone lessons, disconnected from courses or assignments (Dewald, 1999; Donaldson, 2000); lacking sufficient interactivity to create adequate active learning experiences (Dewald et al, 2000); and communicating an academic research process that is not relevant to students' expectations (Veldof & Beavers, 2001).

The Information Literacy Course

Some institutions offer formal information literacy courses. These courses range from for-credit to non-credit, from required to elective, and from distance to face-to-face. They can involve integration with a core curriculum, specific discipline or course, or general information skills (Donnelly, 1998). Such courses have gained popularity

because they offer opportunities for in-depth instruction and reinforcement of research skills through course activities (Frantz, 2002).

According to Jacobson and Mark (2000), instruction is most effective when offered in context with content-based courses and assignments. Academic libraries have incorporated meaningful learning experiences into information literacy courses in a variety of ways:

- University of Oregon's LIB 101 course uses a "scenario-based approach" by building assignments around research situations familiar to undergraduate students (Frantz, 2002).
- Instructors of "Information Literacy" at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry offer research assignments allowing students to address topics from their other courses (Elkins et al, 2001).
- Montana State University College of Technology's Information Literacy course requires students to investigate a personal problem using information gathered throughout the course (Kaip, 2001).
- University of Maryland University College offers a required online course, "Information Literacy and Research Methods," in which students research a particular topic and participate in electronic discussions on timely research issues (Read, 2002).

Information Literacy Across the Curriculum

Other schools go beyond the stand-alone information literacy course by integrating ILI into the overall curriculum. An across-the-curriculum approach is favored because it ties information literacy into all students' experiences (Orr, Appleton, & Wallin, 2001; Snavely & Cooper, 1997). This model requires collaboration among the library, other academic departments, and administration to meet the common goal of teaching information literacy skills.

Specific approaches include integration of information literacy objectives into general education and first-year programs (Hinchliffe & Meckstroth, 2001; Jacobson & Mark, 2000) and development of campus-wide information competency initiatives (Grassian & Kaplowitz, 2001). In these situations, librarians, faculty and others work together to provide ILI at the point of need.

Discussion

Information literacy instruction is alive and well on campuses today. However, there is much work to be done before integrated ILI across the curriculum is standard practice. Some challenges include motivating students to learn information literacy skills; assessing student mastery of concepts and skills; training librarians to serve as instructors and instructional designers (Grassian & Kaplowitz, 2001); advocating the value of information literacy (Bawden, 2001) in an environment of competing literacies (Snavely & Cooper, 1997); and preparing students for business settings that demand a more specialized level of information fluency (Marcum, 2002).

There is a clear need for discussion of information literacy instruction outside of the library field. A more multi-disciplinary approach to information literacy research and instruction will create opportunities for more substantial, curriculum-integrated and long-lasting instructional experiences that will benefit students throughout and beyond their academic careers.

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